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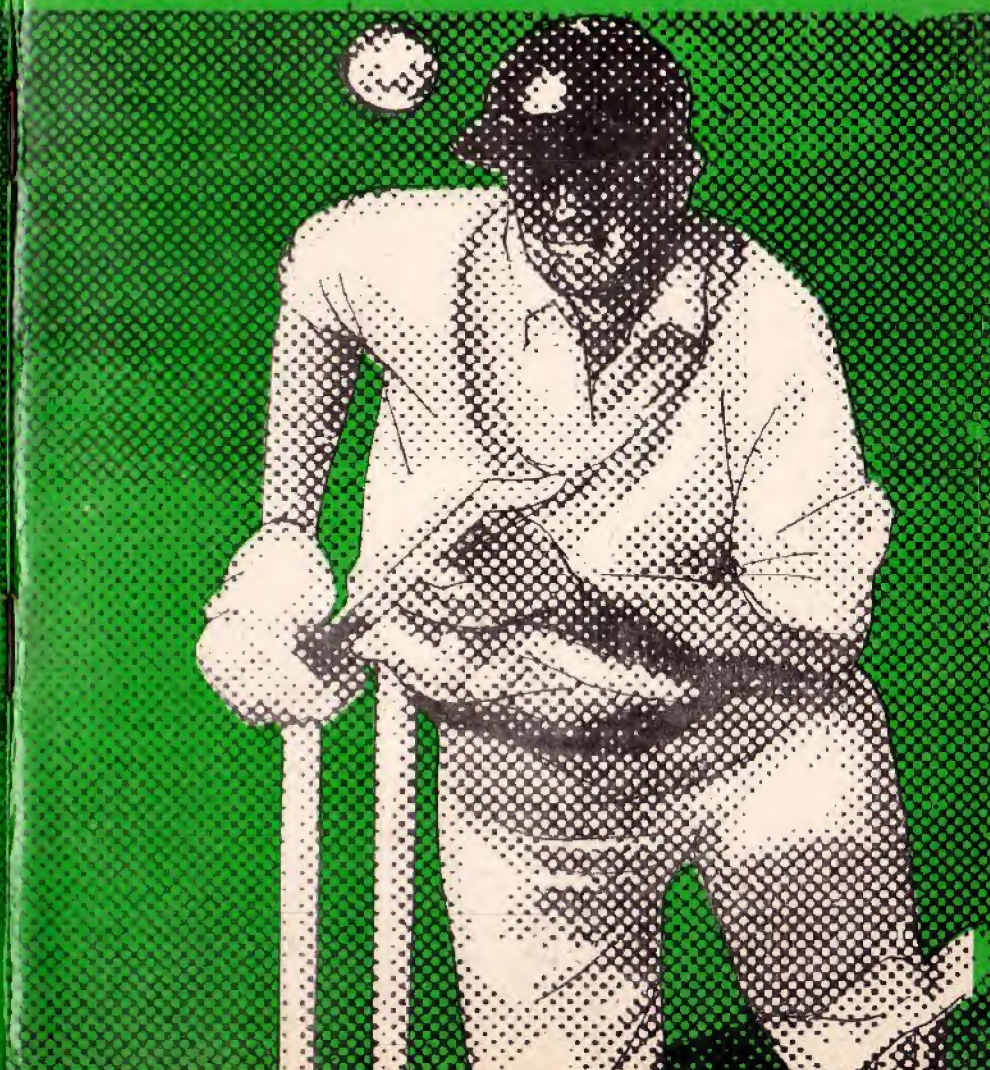
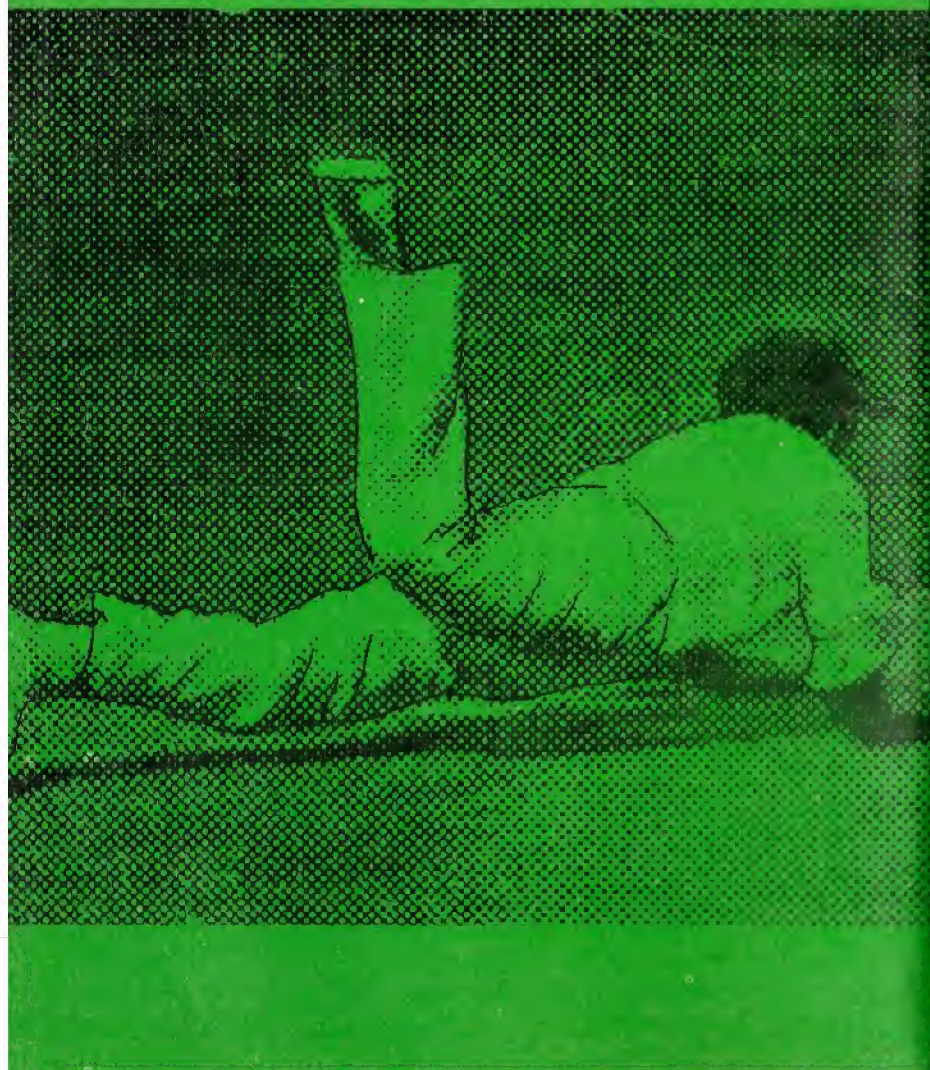
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VIJAY MERCHANT

CRICKET



Nehru Bal Pustakalaya

CRICKET

VIJAY MERCHANT

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The Statesman and the author

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Merchant in action

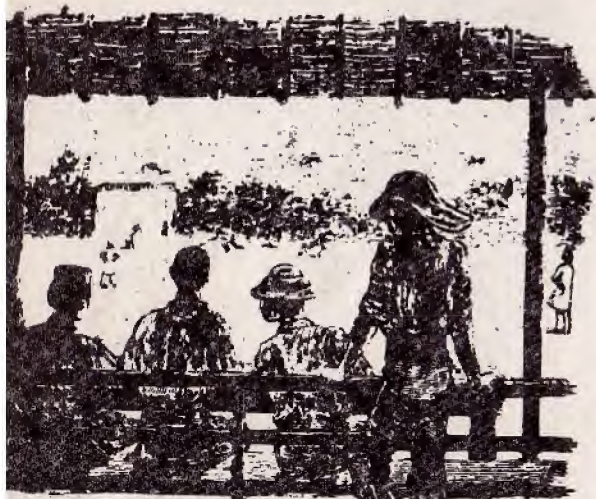


THE GAME

Cricket has been played in India since 1721. It is a Commonwealth game and was introduced by the British in all the territories which they ruled over. The first community in India which took to it were the Parsees in 1848 and by 1892 they became proficient enough for the Presidency matches to be started. These were matches between the Europeans and the Parsees and were played every year in Poona and Bombay. They aroused a great deal of interest in the game.

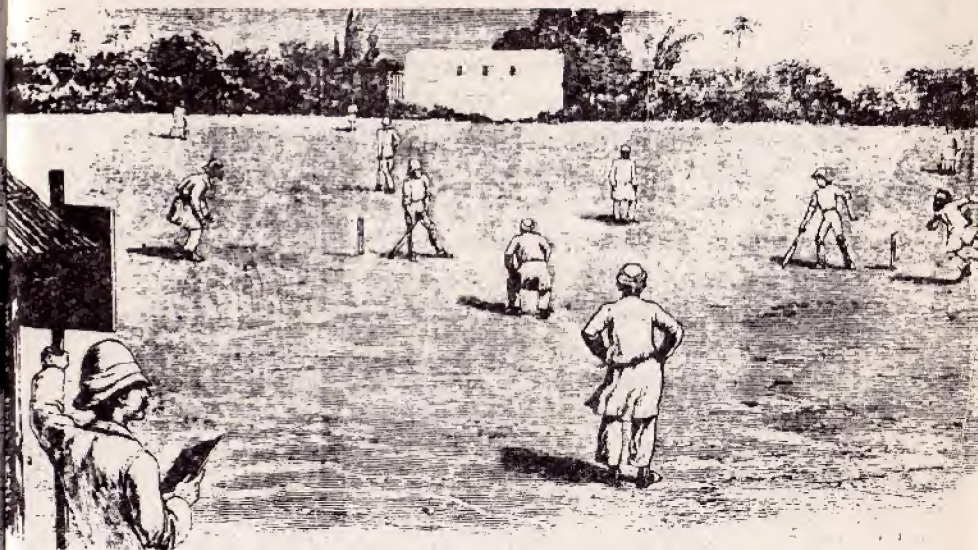
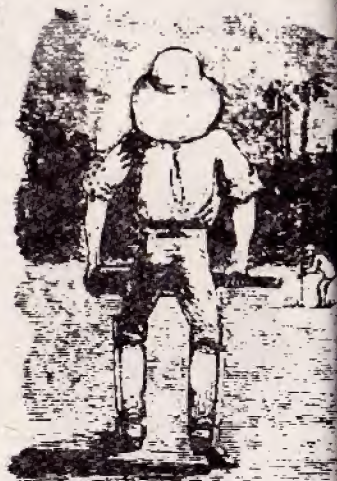
Gradually the other communities also became interested in cricket and in 1907 a third team entered the arena—the Hindus. Thus it became the Triangular tournament. First

CRICKET IN BOMBAY IN OLDEN TIMES

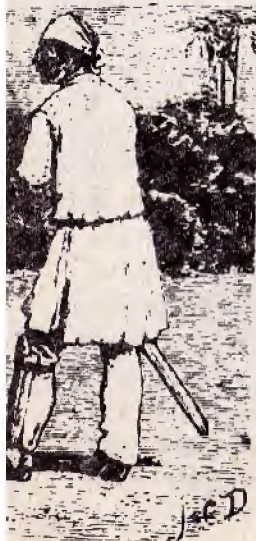


The Scoring Table

Going in



Cricket in Bombay in 1878



A Parsee Cricketer

Coming out

two communities would play and then the winner would play the team that had drawn a bye. When it became the Triangular tournament Poona ceased to be a venue and the matches were played in Bombay which now became the home of Indian cricket. The only exceptions were the Quadrangulares of 1922 and 1926 which were played in Poona. In 1912 a fourth team, the Muslims, arrived on the scene making it the Quadrangular tournament. And finally in 1937 the Jews, the Indian Christians, etc. joined in and it became the Pentangular tournament. This coincided with the inauguration of the Brabourne Stadium in

Bombay where most of the Test cricket in the country has been played. Soon Calcutta and Madras came to the fore and in recent years Delhi and Kanpur have also taken their place in India's Test cricket. Whenever Test matches are played in our country priority is given to Bombay, Calcutta and Madras. If there is a series of five Test matches the remaining two are played at Delhi and Kanpur.

Although cricket is foreign to us, it has now practically become our national game. In the last three years we have nearly reached the top and it is the hope of every lover of cricket that we shall remain there for some time.



CHOOSING THE IMPLEMENTS

Cricket is mainly a game of bat and ball but many other implements are required to play it well. Everyone knows that a match is played between two sides of 11 cricketers each. But for a match to be recorded as first-class, it must be played for at least three days and the parent cricket authority of the country in which it is played must recognise it as first-class.

The cricket ground and playing pitch are usually of turf, i.e. grass, but where because of climatic or other reasons turf wickets cannot be prepared, a coir or jute matting is laid out and firmly nailed down on an earthen surface.

The most essential tools in cricket are the bat and the ball. The bat should not exceed $4\frac{1}{4}$ " at its widest and it should not be more than 38" in length. A player should select a bat which he can wield comfortably. In other words, the bat should feel like a part of his body when he plays. He may use a heavy or a light bat and also a long or a short handle as his game requires. A long or a short handle makes no difference to a batsman's strokes. The general impression that those who late-cut, square-cut or hook the ball need a short handle and those who drive in front of the wicket need a long handle is incorrect.

The player must oil and season the bat before he uses it in a match. The term seasoning means getting all parts of the bat hit by the ball several times. The seasoning is done by either hammering the ball on to the bat or asking a bowler to bowl from a short distance and the batsman playing the ball back again and again, until the surface of the bat is hard enough to receive the impact of the new ball.

The ball should weigh not less than $5\frac{1}{2}$ oz and not more than $5\frac{3}{4}$ oz; it should measure not less than $8\frac{13}{16}$ " and not more than 9" in circumference. Usually a new ball is used after 75 overs in first-class cricket.

Then we have leg-guards for the batsman to protect him from being hit on the legs. We also have gloves, an abdomen-guard and some batsmen also use thigh-pads. An abdomen-guard is an absolute must for a batsman. Both the abdomen-guard and the thigh-pads are worn under the trousers. A few wicket-keepers and batsmen also use a chest-protector on wickets where the ball rises high.

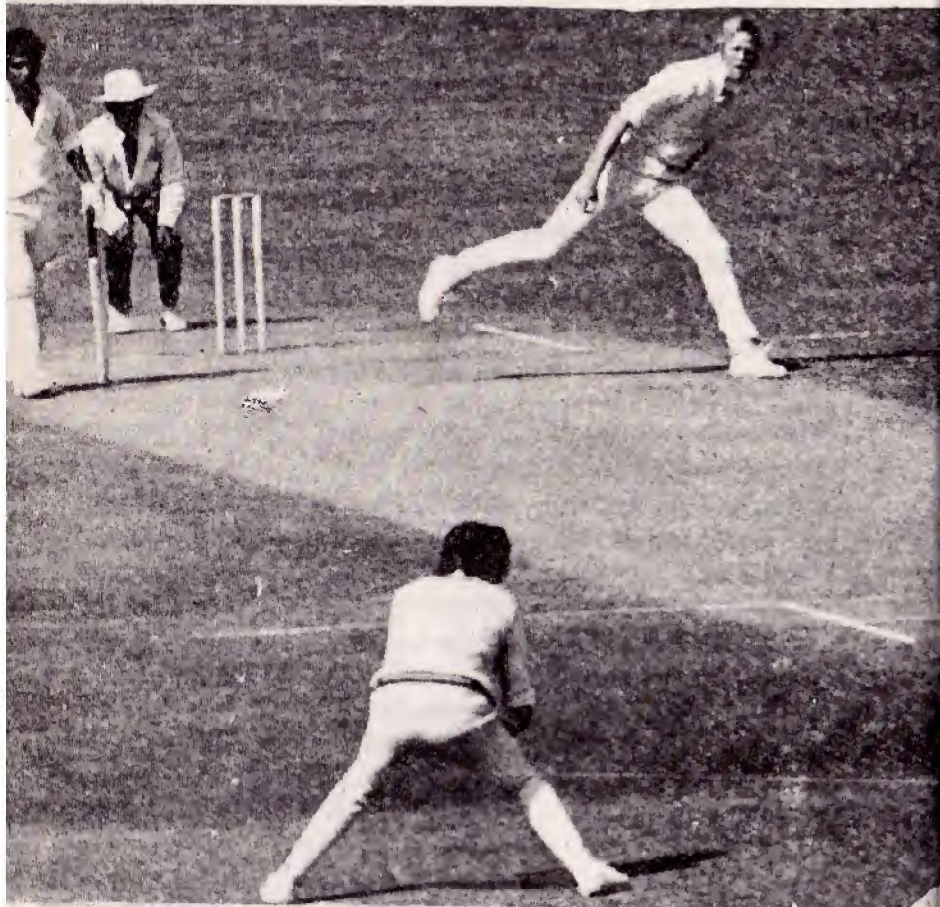
The normal cricket uniform is a white shirt, white trousers, thick white woollen socks and white cricket boots—not shoes. These boots are studded on the soles to give the player a proper grip on turf wickets. Cricket tradition demands that cricketers wear ordinary trousers and not the fancy trousers which are in fashion today.

Crepe-soled shoes or boots should never be worn. Of course, for the bowler such footwear is out of the question because he will never be able to get a proper grip while running up to deliver the ball.

Very long hair should be avoided. A cap is necessary both to cover the hair and as a shield against the glare of the sun. In English weather it is a protection against the cold.

Never wear sun-glasses off the field. Coloured glasses are fashionable and prevent glare but by using them constantly a cricketer lessens his capacity to face bright sunlight and when he is playing he may find the glare too strong.

We have talked about the cricketer's clothes but what about those of the umpires? Formerly umpires were allowed to wear any kind of dress provided they put on a long white coat on top. Now in India umpires in first-class cricket must wear white coats which are neither too short nor too long, a white cloth cap, black trousers and white shoes. They certainly look more dignified in this dress.



Tony Greig bowling



THE TOSS

At the beginning of every match the captain of the home team goes up to the captain of the visiting side and requests him to come out and toss for the choice of the innings. The toss must be made on the field of play. The home captain uses his coin and it is the privilege of the visiting captain to call 'heads'

or 'tails'. The home captain must show both sides of the coin to the visiting captain so that there is no suspicion that a two-headed or two-tailed coin is being used. The visiting captain must call loudly and clearly before the coin falls to the ground so that there may be no confusion. The coin must not be picked up by either captain before the other has confirmed who has won the toss. The side winning the toss has the option of batting first or putting the other side in to bat.

When the captains come out to toss, they carry the final lists of their players with them and exchange them before tossing. Once the toss is over no player on either side can be changed or replaced. This is done in order to avoid either captain taking advantage of a particular situation in which his team may find itself and adding an extra batsman or bowler to it.

As an illustration we may take what happened at the Brabourne Stadium in 1964-65 when Australia paid us a visit. Australia won the toss and went in to bat. While their opening pair was batting, Norman O'Neill, who was put down as No. 3 in the batting order, felt giddy and could take no further part in the game. Yet, according to the Laws of Cricket, his team was not allowed to make any change in the side even though O'Neill had neither batted nor even stepped on to the cricket field. Australia played with 10 men throughout, although they were permitted to have a substitute fielder to field for the indisposed player.



BATTING

Batting is an art which can be developed in two ways: by being coached right from school-days or by study, keen observation and the ability to absorb the best from the game of others. I have never been coached but I have studied all the batsmen who have appealed to me and tried to combine their good points in my own style and temperament. My batting has, therefore, been developed on the strong points of at least seven or eight different batsmen and yet I have not tried to imitate any one of them because imitation makes you lose your own individuality. For instance, I have tried to absorb the quicksilver foot-work of Mushtaq Ali, the full-blooded hook of L.P. Jai, the



C.K. Nayudu

ability to go out of the crease and meet the slow ball at full pitch or on the half-volley of Lala Amarnath, the extreme concentration of Vijay Hazare, the late-cut of Duleepsinhji, the sound defence of Wazir Ali, etc. The aim in batting, after all, is to meet the ball with as straight a bat as possible. For this purpose concentration and the right decision on

how to play the ball, right foot-work and correct technique are absolutely essential. When batting, never make the mistake of deciding which ball to hit or where to hit it before the ball is bowled. Make it a principle—a principle never to be forgotten when batting—that every ball is to be played on its merits and a defensive or an aggressive stroke is to be employed as the ball requires. Correct technique is the foundation of good batting and if one's batting is built on sound lines, good strokes all round the wicket will automatically follow.

A batsman must not only be technically correct but he must also have the big-match temperament. He must not be daunted by the adverse position in which his side finds itself at any stage of the game. He must have nerves of steel and the ability to stay calm and unruffled. The margin of error in batting is so narrow that one little mistake can prove to be the end of your innings.

Cricket is wrongly called a game of chance. It is not. It is a game of great skill, hard and continuous practice, total concentration and big-match temperament.

When you play in the nets bat as if you were batting in a match; imagine the kind of field that a particular bowler will arrange in order to get you out. Bat in a manner whereby you will make the least number of mistakes and not give away your wicket unnecessarily. Don't ever say to yourself, "What does it matter, this is only practice!" Bad habits formed during practice will persist and when you play in a match you will not be able to get rid of them. Too many of our cricketers, even at the all-India



level, do not take practice seriously and quite often the best of them get out three or four times during the first 15 minutes.

A batsman must not only decide which ball to hit but he must also choose which ball to play and which to leave alone. An opening batsman, particularly, must be very careful of the swinging ball just outside the off-stump which is likely to hit the outside edge of the bat and go to the slips for a catch. Jack Hobbs was the greatest master of this art because when the ball was new and moving a great deal he never played a ball which he could avoid and which was unlikely to hit the wicket.

There are certain strokes which a batsman must avoid at a particular stage of his innings. For instance, the

← Lala Amarnath

Vijay Hazare →



opening batsman must never late-cut the ball until he has put his 30 runs on the score-board and the ball has lost some of its shine. He must also not try to square-cut a ball which is moving into him. Even if he mistimes that ball by a thousandth fraction of a second, it will not hit the middle of the bat but take the inside edge and go on to hit the stumps. Again, an opening batsman must not hook the ball unless he is able to keep it along the ground. This is not easy because when the ball hits the bat it is still rising and only a top-grade batsman will be able to bring the bat down on to the ball in time to keep the ball along the ground.

Never hit a ball across the line of flight or against the spin. This is most dangerous. Sometimes a batsman may get away with it but more often than not he will pay the penalty by either completely missing the ball or hitting it on the edge, thus putting up a catch. The safest way to play a ball is not merely to meet it with a straight bat but to see that the back-lift of the bat is also as straight as possible. Many batsmen give a back-lift to the bat in the direction of third-man and then at the moment of impact with the ball, bring the bat down straight. This kind of stroke may come off in practice but sometimes may prove to be risky in matches. The chances of mistakes are fewer when the back-lift is absolutely straight and when you practise this time and again you get into the habit of playing with an absolutely straight bat. The world's greatest cricketers develop this style as a matter of habit and so make very few mistakes.

A batsman must be able to build up his innings. It is



Mankad bowling



not enough for a batsman to stay at the wickets for half an hour or an hour or even more, if he cannot play a big innings for his side. A big score does not mean that the batsman is playing for himself; he has to make the runs to help his team to win. In a team of 11 cricketers not every one succeeds in every match. It is the duty of those who do well to make up for the failure of others in a particular innings and build up a big enough total to win the match.

This spirit appears to be lacking in our cricket today. Quite a few Indian batsmen score their 50s and 60s, become complacent, lose their concentration and are out before they know it. Earlier batsmen like Vijay Hazare, Vinoo Mankad, Vijay Manjrekar, Polly Umrigar and Rusi Modi made big individual scores because they wanted their side to win.

Batsmen are not born; they are made. There is no reason why a batsman of even moderate ability cannot turn himself into an extremely good batsman by rigorous practice, concentration, single-mindedness of purpose and the ability to adapt himself to different situations. Bradman, Trumper, Hammond, Sobers and a few others may be born to greatness but I can name many more ordinary cricketers who by sheer perseverance and hard work became very great batsmen.



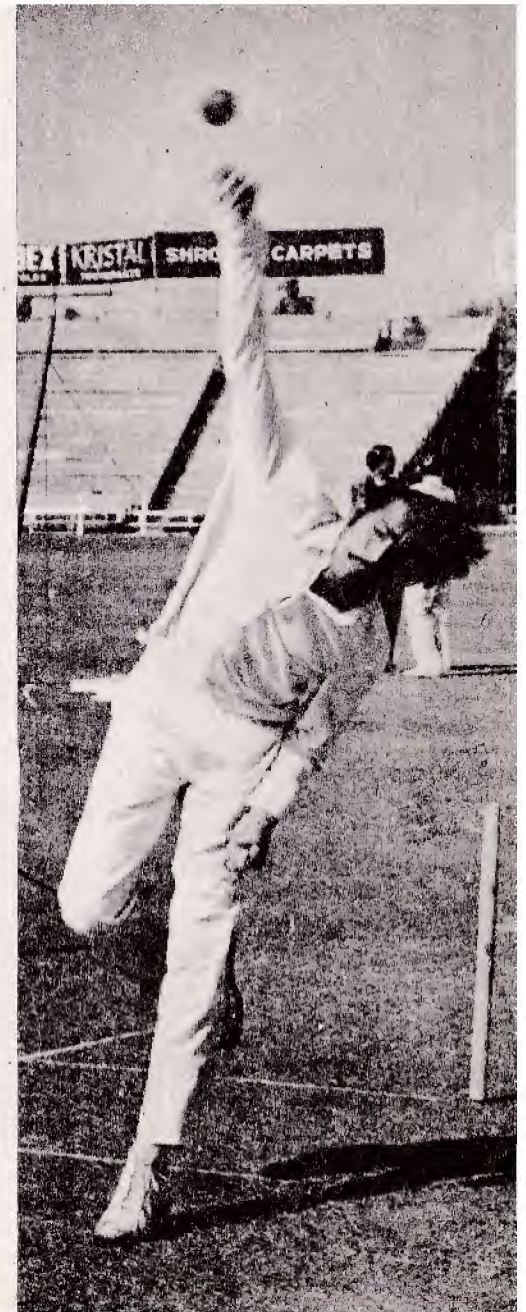
BOWLING

There are two essentials of good bowling—length and direction. The swing and swerve come afterwards and the various kinds of spin even later. Similarly the pace. However well a bowler may spin the ball, however fast he may bowl, unless his ball has length and direction it will not get him a wicket and will be hit all over the field. Length and direction can only be developed by regular practice. Great bowlers have spent hour after hour at the nets bowling to a length and bowling at a single wicket. Once accuracy in length and direction have been achieved a strong foundation for bowling has been laid. The great bowler Clarrie Grimmet practised for many hours on a

pitch in the backyard of his house bowling thousands of balls at a single wicket in order to perfect these two essentials. He could not employ a ball-boy to bring back the balls he had bowled so he hit upon the novel idea of training his dog to pick them up after he had completed an over of eight balls. After an over Grimmet would whistle and his dog who had been lying still in a corner would run up to the wicket, pick up the balls and bring them one by one to him. The whole process took not more than two minutes. If Clarrie Grimmet, one of the world's most accurate bowlers, needed such hard practice, a young cricketer would need it a thousand times more.

A bowler must always bowl his best even at the nets. He must know exactly

Chandrasekhar bowling



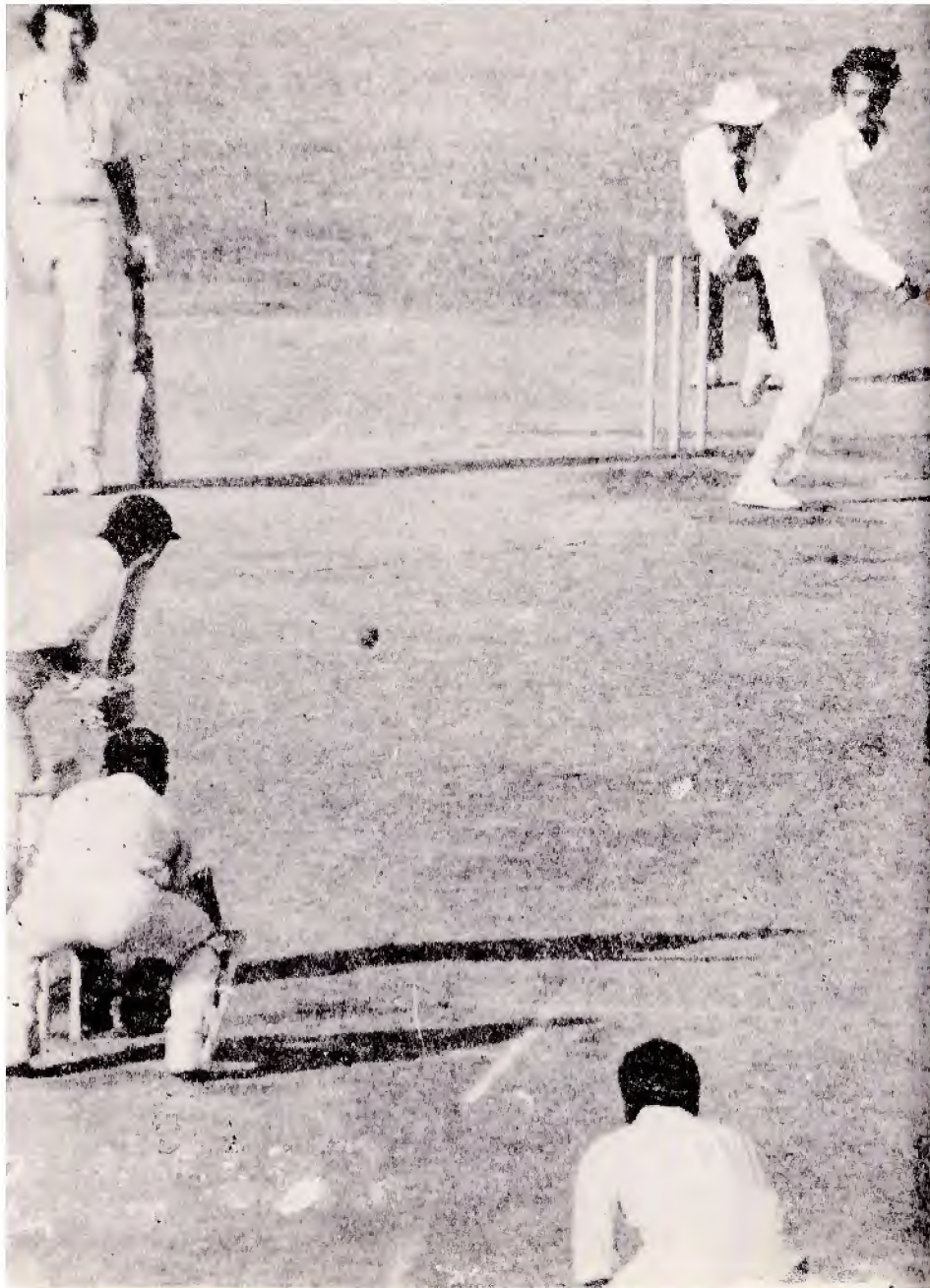


Clattie Grimmet

how he is going to bowl and what field-placing he would require for a particular batsman. This way he will learn how to give away very few runs and capture more wickets. A fast bowler needs physical strength and stamina; a slow bowler relies mainly on great accuracy. On a good wicket a bowler may be called upon to bowl from 40 to 70 overs. Ramadhin bowled as many as 98 overs in a Test innings when playing for the West Indies against England at Birmingham in 1967.

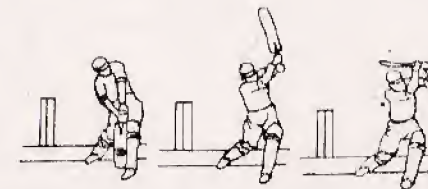
The bowler must learn to forgive the fielder who has dropped a catch. It is no use shouting at him, calling him names or making gestures which will dishearten him. If the bowler does this, it will only result in yet another catch being dropped. On the other hand, a word of sympathy and a little encouragement would do the fielder a world of good and inspire him to do better.

It is said that bowlers win matches. They certainly do and a bowler shows his real greatness by getting a batsman out on a wicket which does not help him. Bowlers are unfortunate in not getting the publicity that batsmen who make a big total or set a record get. And yet, while batting records over a long period have been broken one after another, Jim Laker's record of 19 wickets in a single Test match will probably never be broken in Test or first-class cricket. Even if they do not get their share of publicity let the bowlers remember that they are the most important factor in the team. Unless they are able to get the other side out twice in a match, the match can never be won despite the number of runs the batsmen might make.



On most wickets prepared for big matches these days the bowler has a very arduous task to perform. But it is no use his complaining. Any bowler can bowl well on a wicket which helps him but extremely few can get life out of an unhelpful wicket and make the ball 'talk'. Such bowlers reach great heights and achieve international fame.

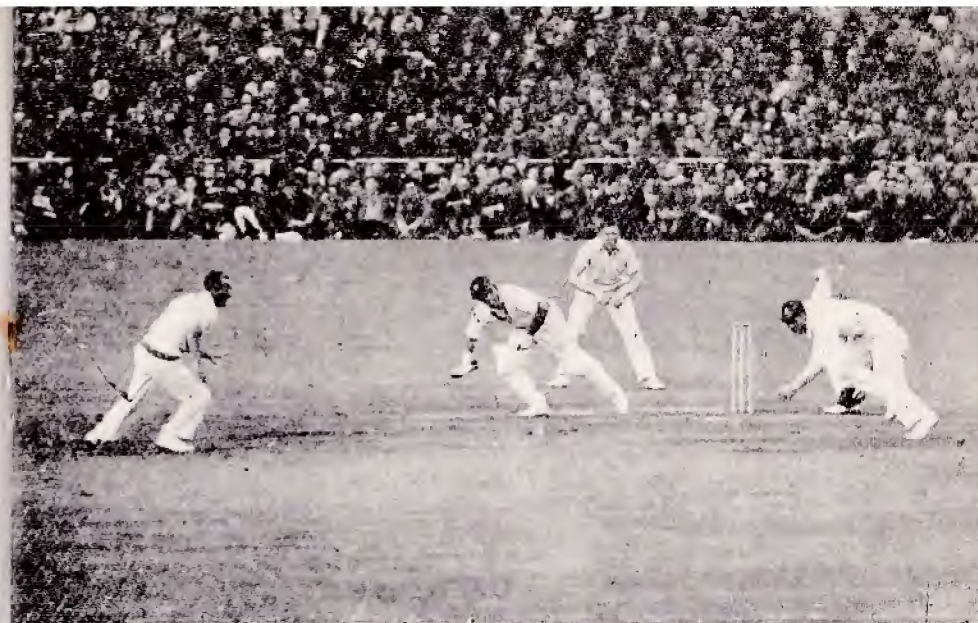
Bowlers bowl not only with their fingers, their hands and their bodies but also with their heads. In other words, a bowler should gauge a batsman's weak points and work out the likely strokes which might get him into trouble. Good bowlers know that a batsman's strong point can also result in his dismissal. For instance, a batsman given to hooking short balls is likely to give a catch at deep fine-leg if the bowler bowls intelligently in that direction where the batsman cannot either hit square or hit along the ground. Similarly with batsmen who square-cut, late-cut and sweep. These strokes bring in many runs but can also prove to be the cause of the batsman's dismissal when the bowler traps him intelligently. It then becomes a battle of wits between the batsman and the bowler and the brain of the bowler stands him in good stead in getting a batsman out.





FIELDING

Fielding is the most ignored and neglected aspect of Indian cricket. All these years if a batsman was able to make more than 50 runs or a bowler was able to capture more than five wickets, he was included in a side whether he was able to hold his catches or not. This has been the bane of Indian cricket. During the last two years, since the introduction of younger talent, the position has become better and Indian fielding has reached world standards. Today we are as proud of our fielders as we are of our bowlers and our batsmen. The unfortunate tendency to include bad fielders in the team begins at school level, continues into college and then to the State and ultimately to our



Merchant playing against England at Old Trafford, 1946

Test teams. Excluding a bad fielder in any class of cricket is the only way to improve the situation. If this is done then in seven to 10 years' time there will not be a single bad fielder in any State XI and, as a result, in our Test teams.

A batsman might fail to make runs, a bowler might fail to get wickets but a good fielder will never fail to bring off catches. A sure pair of hands, agility, anticipation, a clean pick-up and a good throw can be developed by hard practice. Good fielding is as much of a delight to watch as good batting and good bowling. In England in 1946



The Indians coming out to field—Old Trafford, 1946

people used to flock to the grounds not only to see Indian batting and bowling but also to watch Gul Mohamed's great fielding. Lately it has been a great pleasure to watch Eknath Solkar bringing off some miraculous catches at short square-leg and short fine-leg.

It is not fully realised how a good catch or run-out can change the entire outlook of a game and inspire the team to excel itself. The price a team has to pay for a missed catch can never be calculated in terms of runs. One can truthfully say 'catches win matches'.

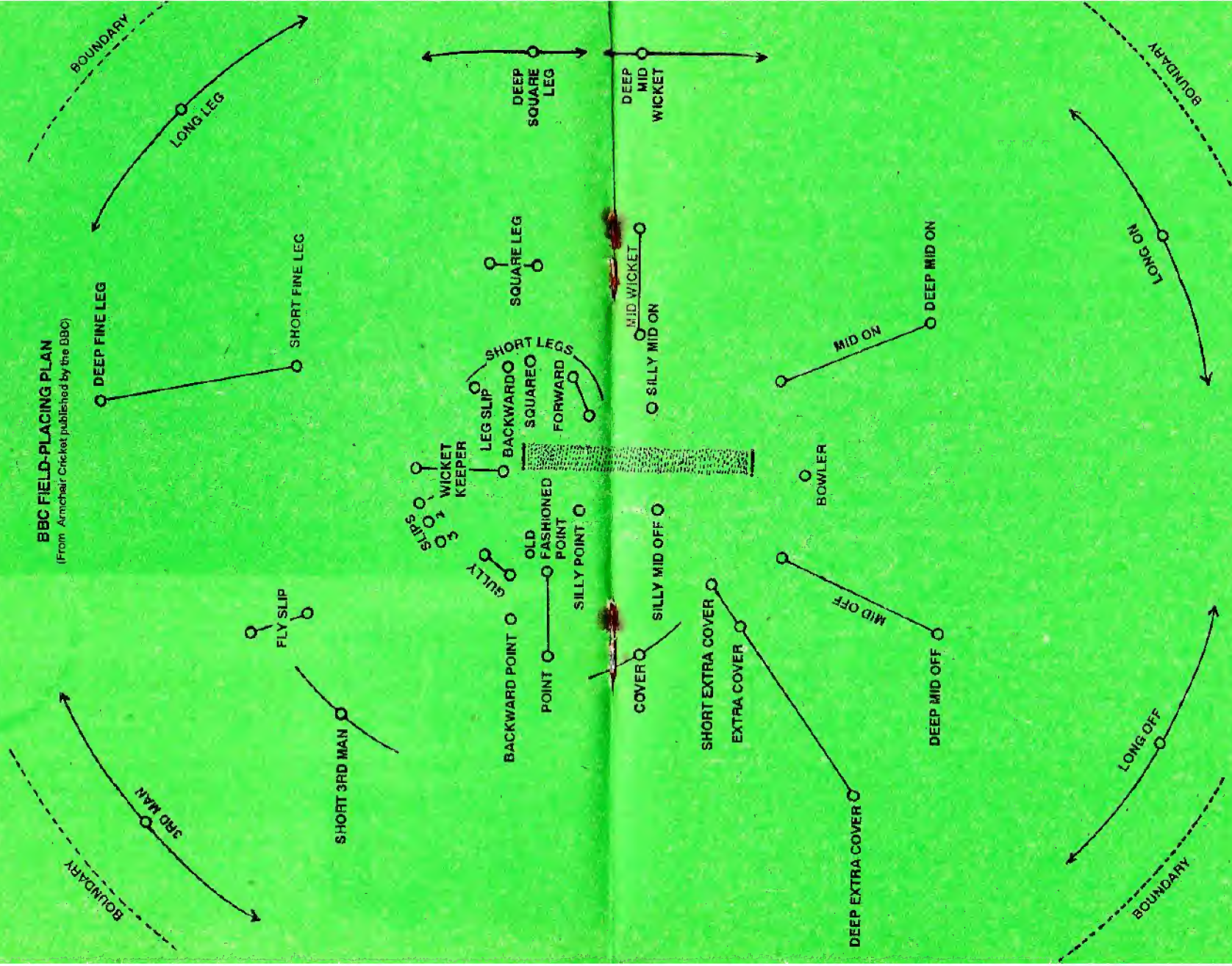


DISCIPLINE AND TEAM-WORK

These are two terms often loosely used and seldom clearly understood. Discipline means carrying out the orders of the captain both in letter and in spirit. If the captain wants you to make quick runs do not argue with him about the state of the wicket, the effectiveness of the bowling, the condition of the pitch, etc. Just do your best to carry out his orders.

Off the field a player should take care of himself and keep a hundred per cent fit. He should be ready to make sacrifices for the sake of the team, and he should make the success of his side his sole mission. This is discipline as I understand it.

(From Armchair Cricket published by the BBC)



Team-work is another important factor for the success of any side. Team-work does not mean that the 11 cricketers must be on cordial terms with one another. Of course, that is very much to be desired. But irrespective of personal relationships, team-work demands that you play for the side and not for yourself. Make a big total but make it quick enough to be helpful to the side. I shall give you three instances of team-work which will give you a better idea of what I mean.

A and *B* are batting, *A* has made over a hundred runs. *B* gets out within the last 10 minutes of the day's play. *C* joins *A*. What is *A*'s duty? His sense of team-work demands that he should protect *C* from the bowling as much as possible in the few minutes left for play. He should not say to himself that there was no one to protect him when he came in to bat and that in any case he is too tired to take on more of the bowling. Neither should he feel that he is the better batsman and that his wicket is more valuable than that of *C*. For then *A* would be playing for himself, not for the side.

Let us take another example. *A* and *B* are bowling. There may be occasions when the captain does not want them to take a wicket. At that time they cannot turn round and argue with the captain or dispute his authority. In 1937-38 when Lord Tennyson's team came to India we played the fourth unofficial Test match against them in Madras. For certain reasons I did not want quick wickets when the visitors were in a position to follow on. Had these wickets been taken, I would have had to make a

delicate decision the same evening. I requested Amarsinh and Mankad not to take any wicket that day. They carried out my instructions. The next day I made the right decision and won the match by an innings. Had these two bowlers lacked discipline, I would not have been in the position to make a correct decision.

And finally, in the field a ball is sometimes hit very high. There are two fielders who can take the catch. *A* is far away from the ball but is an outstanding fielder. *B* is nearer but is a weak fielder. Team-work demands that *A* should call 'side' or 'mine' and take the catch, although it may be more difficult for him.

The advantages of team-work and discipline are better understood in Indian cricket now than in my time. During my playing days we had many outstanding cricketers but they played as individuals, rarely as a team. Today our side is playing as a team and that is why our performance is much better.





WICKET KEEPING

The wicket-keeper is the most important person on the field when a side is not batting. He stands behind the wickets and receives every ball which the batsman either misses or does not play. He must have an extremely sure pair of hands and he must be able to stop most of the balls that come to him. If a wicket-keeper is continuously dropping the ball, he is likely to drop the ball when a catch comes along. The time between a ball hitting the edge of the bat and settling in the gloves is a thousandth part of a second and when the ball touches the bat the wicket-keeper may not know that it is coming and should be caught. That is why it is most important that the wicket-keeper is

always on the alert, concentrates fully on his job and is ready to take every ball.

The wicket-keeper must be physically very fit and should be able to move on the off and the leg sides with extreme agility. It is an incorrect impression that since he does not have to run in the field he does not need to be agile, quick and absolutely fit. On the contrary he has to be the fittest in the side because his job is the most demanding one on the field. Great wicket-keepers are not those who bring off many catches or stump many batsmen but those who drop the least number of balls out of their gloves.

A good wicket-keeper should never lend his gloves to another. From constant use a hollow is formed in the gloves which comfortably fits his own palms and that hollow should not be put out of shape by someone else using the pair.

When a very high catch is offered by the batsman the wicket-keeper should try to take it even if there is another fielder directly under the ball because there is less chance of his dropping it since he has the use of the gloves. He should immediately shout 'side' or 'mine' and take the catch.



CAPTAINCY

A captain's job is very crucial. Much of the performance of the team depends on how he leads the side. It is not enough for him to win the toss, arrange a proper batting order, change the bowlers effectively and suitably place the field. These are his normal duties but he has a hundred and one other things to do which will weld his side into a fighting unit and get the best out of his players. The way he plans his strategy, takes his players into his confidence and knows each player's strong and weak points go a long way in helping the team to do its best.

A captain should never ask a player to do anything which he would not be prepared to do himself. He may

take guidance from the senior cricketers in the team but he must make his own decisions. He must take responsibility on his own shoulders and even if a suggestion made by the vice-captain or another cricketer goes wrong, he should take the blame. The captain must regard himself as one of the cricketers and not apart from them. He must not be reluctant to give credit to the members of his team. He should be ready with a word of encouragement and inspiration whenever necessary. If a player is not doing well either with the bat or the ball the captain should be understanding and sympathetic and help him to do better.

The captain is the pivot on which the team revolves. Much depends on his ability to pull his team together and keep calm when things go wrong. A captain is judged not only by his victories but by the way in which he gets the best out of his side under all circumstances. One outstanding example of a great captain is Frank Worrell, who moulded the West Indian cricketers into a combination that could beat any team in the world.

A captain must never be influenced by his personal likes and dislikes. It is but natural for him to be more friendly with one player than another and, off the field, to mix more with some players than others. But on the field of play and even off the field when he is on tour, he must treat all of them alike. A good captain will never find this difficult because to him the team comes first, the individual afterwards. A captain must be absolutely fair and completely impartial in his dealings with the players. A captain who favours individuals is not only likely to fail as a captain but



Wadekar goes out to bat



Garfield Sobers

will never command the respect of the players. He must remember that he is only the first among equals and that his job is to win the match by every fair means and these include fair treatment to the players.

A captain must never be afraid of criticism. He must face it with dignity and not allow it to disturb him. Some of his decisions are bound to be severely criticised but if he is convinced that he has done his best he should not be afraid of what others say. His duty is to his team and his country. He must give more opportunities to others than to himself. In certain cases this may even mean self-sacrifice but a good captain is expected to put the team above himself.

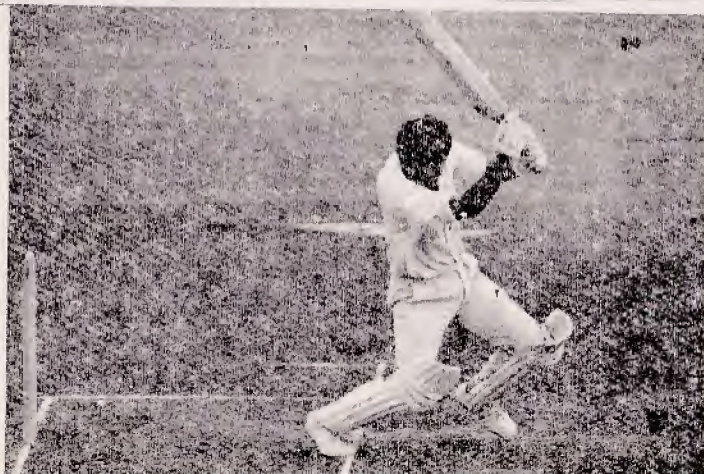


SELECTION

The selectors of any team must be strictly impartial. Considerations other than merit should never weigh with them—merit and merit alone should be the guiding factor. Of course, they cannot select the 11 best cricketers if the 11 do not make a good team. The side comes first, the cricketers come afterwards. The selectors should choose a well-balanced team which will give a good account of itself.

The selectors' job is a thankless one. However carefully they make their selection they will be criticised. This should not deter them from choosing the best side they can and facing the criticism bravely.

The selectors should be in favour of including young cricketers in the side. They must realise that a good team is built on youngsters, never on older players. A wise combination of youth and experience will stand them and the country in good stead. There is no point in saying that young cricketers are too inexperienced to play in Test cricket. If a cricketer is inexperienced then he can only gain experience by playing in the highest class of cricket. Maturity is not attained in the nets or in playing only competitive cricket. Some of the finest cricketers the world has produced made their mark at a very young age and had the selectors not given them an early chance they would not have matured so quickly. Sunil Gavaskar and Vishwanath are our most outstanding examples. If our selectors are half as patient with our younger talent as they are with our senior cricketers, it will not be difficult to build up a great side in the near future. In the past two years young talent has made its mark and if given a fair opportunity will more than prove itself.

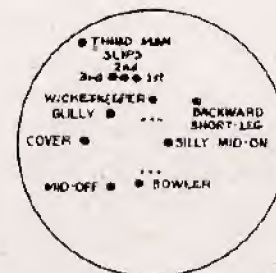


UMPIRING

Today Indian umpires are as good as any in the world. But they are not rated high by other countries. This is because other countries never have an opportunity to see them and when foreign teams come to play the unfortunate tendency these days is for them to criticise the local umpires when they lose. Our umpires are as devoted to their task as any foreign umpire and they are impartial, conscientious, knowledgeable and able to make correct decisions. They do make mistakes, but which umpire in the world does not? At one time English umpires were considered to be the best but nowadays so many countries have criticised their umpiring as not being top-class and sometimes being even partial.

← Gavaskar

Gone are the days when a batsman accepted the umpire's decision as final and binding. These days there is a tendency to stay at the wicket even after being given out so that the public may know that the batsman is not satisfied with the decision. It is not only batsmen who do this but also fielders and bowlers. When an appeal by the bowler is negatived he sometimes throws up his hands in protest, the wicket-keeper throws his cap down, the other cricketers gesticulate and some of them even run up to the umpire to ask how the batsman was given not-out. This lack of discipline on the part of the side does not go well with the idea of sportsmanship associated with cricket. Cricket is one game where umpires' decisions should never be questioned. Umpires are as apt to make mistakes as anyone else but the discipline and sportsmanship of cricket demand that even unfavourable decisions must be accepted with good grace. Even more than the selectors, their task is a thankless one. Their mistakes are noticed and no credit is given to them for their correct decisions. As long as umpires do their job efficiently, and even more important, impartially, they should be treated with the greatest respect.



GROUNDS

For the highest class of cricket, grounds are of turf. They must be smooth and fast for the ball to roll on evenly. Because of the different conditions in each country, wickets cannot be standardized but nowadays all Test matches are played on turf wickets and no longer on matting.

Formerly the boundaries differed with the size of the ground. This resulted in one ground having a 75-yard boundary and another 85 yards. This has now been standardized and Test match grounds all over the world have only 75 yards.

The prepared wicket should be fast and lasting and the ball should rise enough for the bowler to feel he has a

chance to get the batsman out and for the batsman to make good strokes all round the wicket. These are ideal conditions for Test matches but are very rarely found in any country. Either the wicket is too much in favour of the batsman or sometimes, when under-prepared, it is too much in favour of the bowler. Both are bad. The best cricket is played when both the bowler and the batsman feel that they have an equal chance. But rarely do we hear of such perfect wickets because they depend on the nature of the soil and the art of the groundsman.

Quite often we hear of a particular country preparing a pitch to suit its bowlers. This does happen but it is not in the highest traditions of the game.

At one time in Australia, all first-class matches were played to a finish. This led to very tall scores and the batting side rarely declared the innings closed. New records were made, old records broken but the spectators got tired and the attendances fell. There is the unique instance of Victoria (Australia) making a score of 1,107 runs in 1926-27 because the match was to be played to a finish whether the public was entertained or not. Soon Australia saw the drawbacks of this system and now all matches are played to a time schedule.

The ground must accommodate the large number of people who come to witness Test matches. The largest ground in the world is at Melbourne in Australia where they can accommodate 1,20,000 spectators. Before the Olympics there in 1956, they had accommodation for a little over 95,000 but during the Olympic year they increased it to



Cricket Club of India, Bombay

1,20,000. The record attendance at Melbourne for a single day's play was 90,800 when Australia played the West Indies in 1960-61. The highest aggregate attendance for a complete Test match was 3,50,534 on the same ground when Australia played England in 1936-37.

At most grounds the accommodation and amenities are not very modern because the pavilions are rather old. The most modern facilities are available at the Edgbaston ground

at Birmingham (England) where a new stadium and pavilion were built after the Second World War. The amenities here for the cricketers, the commentators, the press and the spectators are more up-to-date. One particular respect in which India scores over all the other cricketing countries is that at Bombay in the Cricket Club of India pavilion itself all the cricketers can be accommodated. This is a great help to the cricketer. He can get up as late as half past nine in the morning, go to the nets at ten-fifteen and start playing the match at half past ten. In the evening within five minutes of the end of play he can be in his room for tea and a chat with friends. He can also avoid autograph-hunters and be completely relaxed after the game.

Seeing how rapidly interest in cricket is growing our five Test centres will have to increase their accommodation. In 1972-73 at least 15,000 people must have been turned away from each ground because of lack of accommodation.



CROWDS

Crowds all over the world are partisan and that is but natural. Of all the seven cricketing countries perhaps the English crowds are the most impartial and quietest. The West Indian and Indian crowds are the noisiest and sometimes even get out of control. The Australian crowds are the most knowledgeable and go in for intelligent barracking. They heckle the cricketer who plays dull cricket and pass remarks which add to the fun of the game.

For instance, during a Test match in Australia in 1954-55, when a particular batsman was going out to face Tyson, he was so nervous that he could not close the latch of the pavilion gate after him. A voice from the crowd shouted,

"Leave it open buddy, you won't be long." On another occasion, a batsman had played at and missed a number of balls. Came a call from a barracker, "Send him down a grand piano and see if he can play that." Once a young English batsman had been batting for a long time without scoring a run. Suddenly he hit the ball on the off-side and went in for a very quick single. Shouted a barracker, "Whoa, he has bolted."

Indian crowds are very distracting because they make a noise even when the ball is in play. Indian batsmen have got used to this but visiting cricketers get very disturbed and are unable to concentrate. Of course, they get used to it after a time but it would be good for the game if our crowds were disciplined and restrained.

English crowds, on the other hand, are extremely polite, very quiet and very well-behaved. They appreciate the game of both sides and are the least partisan of any country. They applaud without being noisy. Even when things go wrong or there is extremely dull cricket their method of protest is only slow hand-clapping—nothing more. Very rarely is a game disturbed by the crowd and, believe me, it is a pleasure to play on English grounds. When the crowds are very impressed by the performance of anyone, they give a standing ovation to the cricketer or the team while the players are walking back to the pavilion. That is why some of the happiest hours of my cricketering life were spent on the cricket fields of England.



SPORTSMANSHIP

Cricket is one game which is played not only according to the Laws of Cricket but more in the spirit of sportsmanship. The Laws of Cricket are made so that unfair advantage may not be taken of any particular situation; but that does not mean that one should always insist on following these laws to the letter. When a difficult situation arises all that one has to ask oneself is, "Is it fair?" In other words, what is fair is cricket and what is not just isn't cricket. That is why we have the saying, "It isn't cricket" when anything unfair is done. We never say, "It isn't tennis" or "It isn't hockey" or "It isn't badminton". Only in the case of cricket is this phrase used. This shows more

than anything else that the words 'fair play' and 'cricket' are synonymous.

There are many examples of outstanding sportsmanship in cricket. In 1909 Jack Hobbs, playing for England against Australia at Leeds (England), hit a ball to the boundary at mid-wicket and in making that stroke dislodged a bail with his right foot. An appeal was made but neither of the two umpires had seen the incident because their eyes were on the ball speeding to the boundary. He was given not-out. Jack Hobbs knew that he was out hit-wicket, so two balls later he drew his bat away from a straight ball and allowed himself to be bowled. This is sportsmanship at its best.

In 1964-65 Ken Barrington was playing in the third Test for England in South Africa, and when 49 he was caught behind the wicket. The umpire declared him not-out. Barrington knew that he had touched the ball, so he hesitated for a moment and then walked towards the pavilion. As he left the umpire declared him out. This is the only instance on record in Test cricket where a batsman on being given not-out declared himself out and withdrew from the crease. Such impressive examples of sportsmanship may be rare but they are worth emulating.

Games, particularly outdoor games, teach us something useful in life but cricket has more to give than other games. It teaches discipline and team-work; it makes you keep physically fit not only for a match of five days but for an entire season of four or five months; it teaches you to be modest because one day you may be very successful and the very next day you may be a total failure and it teaches you

never to underestimate the opponent. The lessons learnt on the cricket field are always useful on the wider field of life. It is not for nothing that the Duke of Wellington said at the end of a great victory, "The battle of Waterloo was won in the playing fields of Eton." These words are the greatest tribute ever paid to the game.



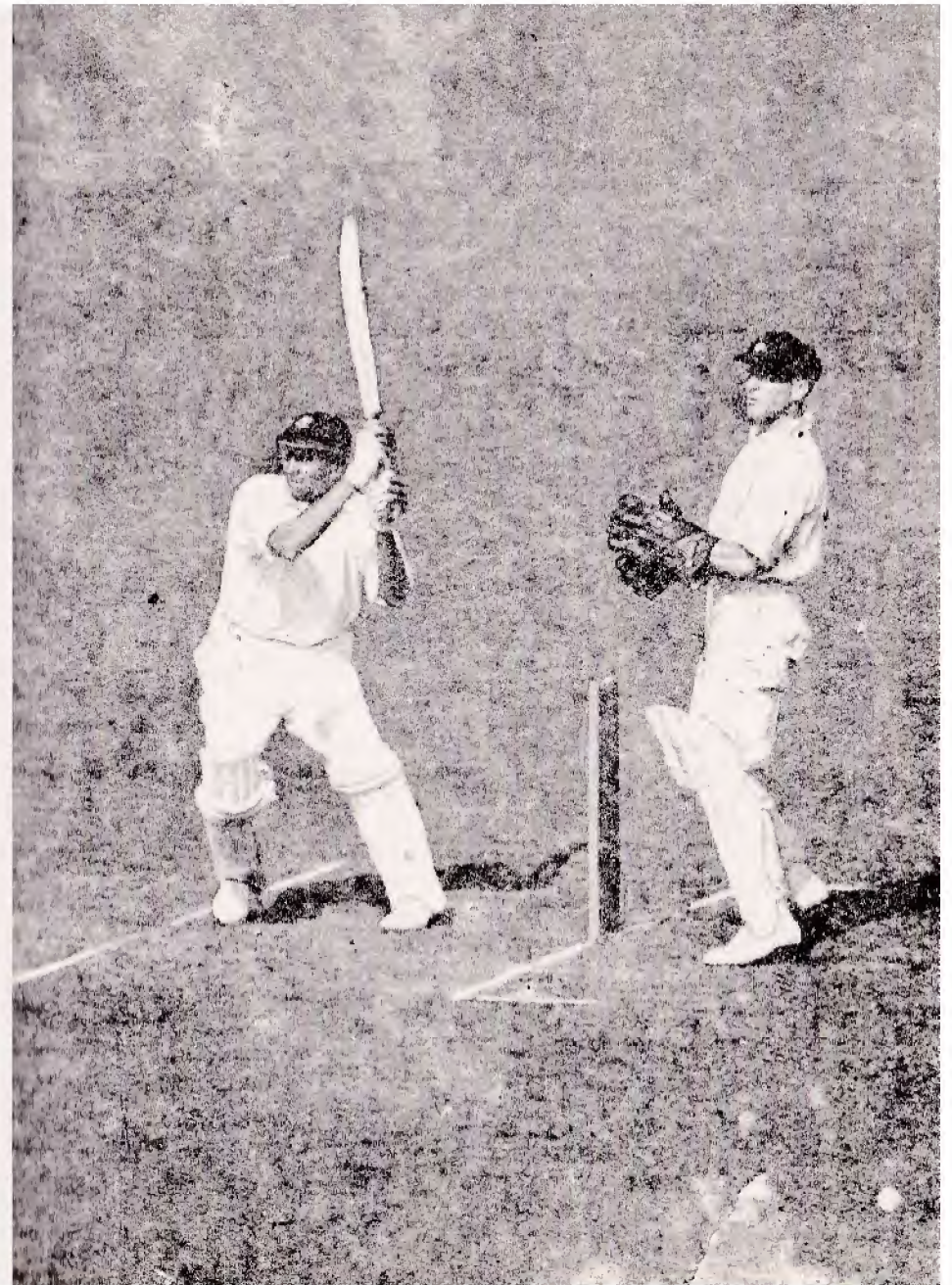


TEMPERAMENT

Cricket is not merely a game of patience, ability, skill and technique. These a player may have and yet may not reach the top. Temperament too is essential in order to succeed. A player who is nervous will not make much headway. He will lack the big-match temperament which is so necessary in big cricket because of the class of players involved and the tension in Test matches.

When the great counties in England, Lancashire and Yorkshire played matches many years ago, such was the tension and the class of cricket that any outstanding performance was considered by the selectors as good enough to qualify for Test cricket.

Duleepsinhji hits a six!→



Now to illustrate an aspect of temperament. Once I went to K. S. Duleepsinhji, one of the greatest cricketers this country has produced, and asked him why I felt nervous every time I went out to open an innings whether in a Test match, a Ranji Trophy fixture or even for my small club. He asked me what I felt. I said, "As I walk towards the wicket I wonder whether at the end of the first over I will still be there or back in the pavilion." "For how long do you feel this, Vijay?" asked Duleepsinhji. I replied, "Until the bowler starts his run to bowl the first ball. Then this feeling disappears and all that matters is the ball, the bowler and my bat."

Duleepsinhji smilingly replied, "That is only nervous tension. It is a good thing because every player must be tense with concentration for a big match and he must ask himself time and again whether he is going to do well. This brings his concentration to the highest pitch which is necessary to be successful in the highest class of cricket. Those who are over-confident and complacent about their batting do not concentrate enough and lose their wickets. Nervousness which persists throughout your play is bad but nervous tension is good. Don't worry about it, Vijay, because nervous tension brings out the best in a cricketer's game."

This was a revelation to me and never again did I worry about my feeling of nervousness when I went to the wicket. By his advice Duleepsinhji helped me a great deal not only in my cricket but also in life.



A MEMORABLE INCIDENT

In 1933-34, I got my first chance to play in Test cricket in India. The M.C.C. team under Douglas Jardine was in our country to play three Test matches. Fortunately I was able to do sufficiently well to retain my place in all the three Tests.

During the Test matches my younger sister, Laxmi, had given me an autograph book to get the autographs of the visiting players. I had carefully put down 'M.C.C. Touring Team—1933-34' on one of the pages. Under this heading I took the autographs of all the 16 players who visited India.

Two months later I had an occasion to approach Gandhiji for his autograph which my sister was very keen to

M.C.C. Touring Team
1933-34

- | | |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. <u>E. Ordine</u> | 10. <u>C.S. Marriott</u> |
| 2. <u>C.H. Waller</u> | 11. <u>W. Lister</u> |
| 3. <u>B.H. Valentine</u> | 12. <u>M. S. L. Lister</u> |
| 4. <u>H. E. Lister</u> | 13. <u>A.H. Batewell</u> |
| 5. <u>E. B. Clarke</u> | |
| 6. <u>L. Townsend</u> | 14. <u>R. J. Grogan</u> |
| 7. <u>H. Vinty</u> | 15. <u>J. Langridge</u> |
| 8. <u>H. Hill</u> | 16. <u>J. H. Murray</u> |
| 9. <u>C. Barnett</u> | 17. <u>W. H. Lister</u> |

have. There were quite a few people present when I made my request. Gandhiji smiled and leafed through the pages of the autograph book and then underneath the names of the M.C.C. players wrote, '17—M.K. Gandhi'. I immediately understood the greatness of the man and what had prompted him. By that unforgettable signature as the 17th man of the M.C.C. team he showed that although he was prepared to fight the British Government tooth and nail for the independence of India, he had nothing against the common man of England and was even prepared to put himself down as the 17th man of an English cricket team.



* Gandhiji's autograph as one of the members of the M.C.C. team, 1933-34



WHAT I OWE TO CRICKET

I come across many sportsmen who say, "See how much I have done for the game and how little the game has done for me." Very few cricketers, or for that matter those who play other games, ever realise that it is the game that does very much more for the player than the player can ever do for the game. Players who talk of doing a lot for the game think too much of themselves and do not realise how much the game has done for them. So that you may understand this better, let me tell you what I owe to cricket.

Cricket has given me my name. My name would not have been Vijay Merchant but for cricket; it would have

been Vijay Thackersey—Thackersey being my great grandfather's name and in the case of all the members of my family their surname also. I got the name Merchant from the Principal of my school—the Bharda New High School—since trade was our profession at that time. I did not change over to Thackersey on graduation because by then I had played in the Quadrangular cricket tournament and felt that it would create confusion. So, but for cricket, I would have been Vijay Thackersey.

Cricket has given me fame. It has given me firm friendships, opportunities to travel abroad and good health and a strong constitution. It has made me realise that one should not be overjoyed by success or disheartened by failure. It has taught me never to be proud of my achievements and never to underestimate the opponent. It has made me realise that a game is never lost until the last ball is bowled; never give up, keep on fighting right till the end. Cricket has taught me to tackle problems as they come the way one plays every ball on its merits. It has also taught me that just as you never run away from a bumper or a beamer, you never solve the problems of life by running away from them. By teaching me to make up for the failures of others in a game, it has taught me to help those who are less fortunate than I am. And finally, it has given me a sportsman-like attitude to life—an attitude which I would never have normally developed.

All this I owe to cricket. Cricket does not owe anything to me. I am extremely proud that I was able to do my bit for the land of my birth through cricket and I shall always

be grateful to the game for this. After I am gone, I do not want any memorials, I do not want any trophy or tournament named after me. I only want to be remembered as a simple cricketer who tried to pay his debt to his country through one of the greatest of all games—CRICKET.

